unforeseen surprises are feared from having to change date field lengths.

Some organizations, already worrying whether they can adapt before 2000, have less time than they realize. For example, a "99" in a year field may not represent a year but instead be a flag. Or information may be entered now that pertains to the next century (a loan today may have an end date in the next century, which would cause the program to reject the information with the message that a loan cannot end before it begins. This has actually happened.)

So in addition to ease of conversion and high confidence level, my suggested approach (because ease equals speed) may allow deadlines to be met that are more stringent than some organizations realize.

I have spent considerable time trying to think of valid counter arguments to the above proposal, and those I have come up with have all been weak. The most valid of the lot is that organizations might be required to furnish other organizations with files that contain four-digit year fields. But I cannot imagine an easier programming job than accepting as input a record with a two-position year field(s) and producing an output record with additional characters "19" or "20" added where appropriate.

To summarize, it seems the world is bent on squandering untold billions for no valid reason. ◆

About the Author

Peter Errington has spent his entire career in data processing, starting in 1961. He retired in 1996, having worked for three private firms and two government agencies. From 1961 to 1971, he was employed at the Southern New England Telephone Co., General Electric, and Informatics. In 1971, he joined the Agency for International Development, where he specialized in payroll and personnel systems and economic and social data banks. In 1989, he moved to the Defense Logistics Agency, where, among other things, he worked extensively on Continuous Acquisition and Lifecycle Support and warehouse automation.

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Year 2000 PROGRESS
Mission-Critical Systems of Federal Departments and Agencies

	Assessment Completed	Renovation Completed	Testing Completed	Implementation Any	Rating
SSA Social Security Administration	YES	78%	67%	YES	A-
GSA General Services Administration	YES	35%	26%	YES	B
NSF National Science Foundation	YES	33%	25%	NO	B
SBA Small Business Administration	YES	35%	35%	YES	B
HHS Department of Health and Human Services	YES	28%	10%	YES	B-
EPA Environmental Protection Agency	NO	33%	28%	YES	C
FEMA Federal Emergency Management Agency	NO	35%	35%	YES	C
HUD Department of Housing and Urban Development	YES	9%	2%	YES	C
Interior Department of the Interior	YES	43%	0%	NO	C
Labor Department of Labor	YES	15%	11%	YES	C
State Department of State	YES	25%	0%	NO	C
VA Department of Veterans Affairs	NO	51%	28%	YES	C
DOD Department of Defense	NO	40%	34%	YES	C-
Commerce Department of Commerce	NO	15%	6%	YES	D
DOE Department of Energy	NO	10%	10%	YES	D
Justice Department of Justice	YES	1%	1%	NO	D
NRC Nuclear Regulatory Commission	YES	0%	0%	NO	D
OPM Office of Personnel Management	YES	3%	0%	NO	D
Agriculture Department of Agriculture	NO	8%	4%	YES	D-
NASA National Aeronautics and Space Administration	NO	8%	7%	YES	D-
Treasury Department of the Treasury	NO	6%	5%	YES	D-
AID Agency for International Development	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A	F
DOT Department of Transportation	NO	0%	0%	NO	F
Education Department of Education	NO	0%	0%	NO	F